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NOAA ANNOUNCES FUNDING FOR ALASKA FISHERIES HABITAT RESTORATION

The Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) today announced a \$96,900 award for fisheries habitat restoration in Alaska's Matanuska-Susitna Valley. Funds were awarded through the NOAA Restoration Center's Community-based Restoration Program. The community-led project will improve and restore freshwater habitats for Coho salmon and several other anadromous fish species.

"This grant helps to restore freshwater fish habitats for the Alaska's Matanuska-Susitna Valley. It builds awareness, appreciation, knowledge and an understanding of the NOAA Restoration Center's Community-based Restoration Program," said retired Navy Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "NOAA and the Bush Administration are committed to working with regional authorities to improve our understanding of the environment."

The multi-phase project will provide unimpeded fish access to rearing and spawning habitats in parts of the Little Susitna watershed, Meadow Lakes and the Big Lake drainage. **This will be accomplished by replacing undersized and failing culverts and improving stream hydrology at several public road crossings.** Once the culverts are replaced, community volunteers and local organizations will plant native riparian vegetation and conduct follow-up site monitoring.

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough is the lead project partner and funding recipient. Chuck Kaucic, Project Manager for the Borough's Fish Passage Program, is confident about the program's potential. "NOAA's cooperative funding and technical assistance adds one more qualified, credible partner to our multi-agency team," he stated. "We are dedicated to removing fish passage blockages from our road system. NOAA funding enables us to accomplish restoration goals in road service areas that would not otherwise have the financial resources to perform the work for many years."

“Access to suitable rearing habitat is critical to the survival of juvenile salmonids,” said Jim Balsiger, Regional Administrator for NOAA Fisheries in Alaska. “Community efforts to restore fish passage and habitat quality in Alaska’s waterways play an important role in sustaining healthy salmon populations.”

Additional project partners include: Wasilla Soil and Water Conservation District, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska Department of Natural Resources and the Boy Scouts of America.

NOAA’s Community-based Restoration Program (CRP) is a financial and technical federal assistance program within NOAA Fisheries Office of Habitat Conservation. The program promotes strong partnerships at the national, regional and local levels to support grassroots, community-based restoration of living marine resources and their habitats.

Staff from the NOAA Restoration Center and NOAA Fisheries Alaska Region work closely with local communities to develop and implement on-the-ground projects. Community groups and youth organizations play an active role in developing project ideas, constructing and completing projects and monitoring project success. This active community involvement promotes stewardship, environmental education and a conservation ethic.

Since 1996, the Community-based Restoration Program has provided funding and technical support to community organizations across the nation in order to effectively restore marine, estuarine and riparian habitats. To-date, more than 800 projects have been implemented with NOAA funding and funding leveraged from national and regional partners.

NOAA Fisheries (National Marine Fisheries Service) is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation’s living marine resources through scientific research, management, enforcement and the conservation of marine mammals and other protected marine species and their habitat.

The Commerce Department’s National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation’s coastal and marine resources.

On the Web:

NOAA - <http://www.noaa.gov>.

NOAA Fisheries -<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

NOAA Restoration Center and the Community-based Restoration Program -
<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration>